

## Your details

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**Title**

Dr

**First name**

James

**Last name**

Vassie

## Submission details

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**I am making this submission as**

A member of the general public

**Submission type**

I am making a personal submission

**Consent to make submission public**

I give my consent for this submission to be made public

## Share your experience or tell your story

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**Your story**

From early November to late January, I and the residents of NSW endured the stress and smoke of the Climate Fires. During the Christmas break, I was preparing to travel to my usual summer holiday destination of Burrill Lake, on the NSW South Coast. My family was already down there at their holiday home. In the lead up to my planned departure on New Year's Day, my family were sending me a number of photos that showed the fires approaching Burrill Lake. On New Year's Eve, my family contacted me from Burrill Lake and told me not to come down the next day. They had lost power and couldn't guarantee that they would be able to drive to Nowra to pick me up. They were right. Over the course of the day, the Currowan bushfire tore through communities along the Princes Highway. The road was shut and power remained out for days. I decided I would return to work two weeks earlier than I had planned. There seemed no sense in using up my annual leave just sitting at home (after all, that's something you would do during a pandemic). My family remained stuck at Burrill Lake. They reported a shortage of supplies at the grocery stores. This was due to thousands of residents from Batemans Bay being stuck in Ulladulla after the evacuation and closure of

the highway south of Burrill Lake. Their regular updates were stressful and made me fear for their health and safety. At the same time, I was furious at our country's inaction on climate change. After several nail biting days, my family managed to return to Sydney. In mid January, I travelled to Burrill Lake after the fire situation there had stabilised. The sight of burned forests on the drive down was incredibly sad. One day whilst I was down there, a hot westerly wind threatened to push fires back to Burrill Lake again.

## **Terms of Reference (optional)**

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The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#).

### **1.1 Causes and contributing factors**

Scientists in 2008 had warned that if climate change was left unabated, bushfires of the intensity we witnessed would become the norm by 2020. We knew this was going to happen and we did nothing. And how did the politicians respond? By denying climate change. We are the largest per capita emitter of greenhouse gases and, when you factor in our exports, the fifth largest overall emitter. Could we alone have stopped the Climate Fires? Probably not. But the example we set would serve to encourage other nations to reduce their emissions. We can no longer use the argument "we're tiny, we can't make a difference", because when you add up all of the tiny contributions from small nations, they exceed the emissions of China, India and the United States.

With regards to fuel loads and hazard reductions, NSW Fire and Rescue Service made it clear that political parties do not influence their decisions in this direct quote: "Political parties of any denomination do NOT influence the decisions of organisations like FRNSW, ACT Fire and Rescue, ACT and NSW Rural Fire Services and Parks and Wildlife Services when choosing when and how to do Hazard Reduction burns. It just doesn't work like that. The main reason Hazard Reduction burns are cancelled or delayed is due to the predicted intensity of the burn exceeding the limits that would make it safe for firefighters, native flora and fauna and obviously you wonderful people." This is good and it should continue to be the practice. Politicians should not be involved in decisions to conduct hazard reduction.

### **1.2 Preparation and planning**

We have a responsibility to safeguard lives, native wildlife, ecosystems and property. I would be eager to see First Nations cultural burns added to our hazard reduction strategies. This proved effective when a property was saved in Conjola.

## **Supporting documents or images**

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### **Attach files**

- Resized\_20191231\_110048.jpeg
- FOT2F7E.jpg
- IMG\_20200112\_112845\_978.jpg





